

[Hopkinson]

W14994 1 Conn. 1938-9 Hopkinson

Mrs. Edith Hopkinson Gulf Road, Northfield:

"What is it you want young man? I'm under doctor's care; been under doctor's care for the past two years. I really shouldn't see anybody. I'm expecting the doctor this afternoon, as a matter of fact.

"Well, if you can copy what you want from newspaper clippings, and not take too long about it, you may come in. I don't let everybody in, you know, but I'm trusting you, that you're what you say, and that this material will help you.

"I can't permit any of these clippings to be taken out. I value them, you know. Perfectly useless to most people, but I value them. What's it going to be used for, again? Oh, I see. Where do you come from, young man, New Haven? Oh, I see. Well, I was going to say, if you liven in New Haven you could go see my uncle James Catlin, he used to be quite an authority on Northfield history, though he's eighty six years old now, his memory may not be quite what it was. He lives at 181 West Rock avenue.

"Yes my maiden name was Catlin, Edie Catlin they always called me. I married Mr. Hopkinson. He started the Crescent Knife Company, with Mr. Bumstead, but it didn't do so well. Mr. Hopkinson is dead now. Have you been to see Mr. Bumstead? She often says she's the only person in Northfield who can remember back one hundred years. Just joking, you know. But of course her mind isn't what it was. I take it you want accurate dates, and all that sort of thing. I'm not so good on dates myself, but if I can just find those clippings————

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"Here they are young man, it's fortunate I was able to lay my hands on them so quickly. Sometimes they get mislaid and I don't know where to look for them. But I had them out for Mrs. Goodwin not long ago, she was writing something or other.

"I'll just pull this little table out for you and you can sit right down and 2 look over the clippings. I'd better stop talking so you can concentrate on what you're doing.

"Now you see, most of these were taken from the Waterbury and Thomaston papers. Here's one from the Waterbury American of August twenty-third, 1876. That's two years after I was born. [Seems?] to be a historical piece by Howard Peck. Yes, that's what it is, all about the history of the village. Mr. Peck read it at some gathering, apparently.

"You're interested in the Pecks? Well, you'll no doubt find something of value in those clippings. I'd better keep quiet, so you can get to work on them. Old Mr. Peck, he died before my time, of course. I remember the sons quite well, of course, and the old mill.

"Howard was a very fine man, he was the peddler. But quite eccentric. I'll tell you something about him, but I wouldn't want it printed because it would hurt George Peck, and I wouldn't want that to happen for anything Howard used to call on people in Watertown and occasionally sleep there over night.

"And of course he traveled about so late at night that he was usually miles from home when he wanted to go to bed. Well, these people were awakened one night by the sound of snoring and the man of the house got up to investigate, and he found Howard asleep in the guest room. He hadn't bothered to knock and ask if he might come in, you see, he just went up and made himself at home. That was the sort of thing he used to do. He was a fine man, generous and public spirited, but somewhat eccentric. He was very fond of reciting his poems and singing at public gatherings, too. They didn't always want him to, either. But of course his health wasn't so good. He was subject to epileptic fits. And some people thought that made him inclined to be a little queer.

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"You'll doubtless find something in those clippings, I'd better give you a chance to look them over. Old Mr. Jeremiah Peck was an eccentric, too, from stories I've heard about him. Very set in his ways, and such opposed to the use of liquor. And very religious. They tell about him going to revival meetings in Bristol years ago. There was a family of colored people living in Thomaston at the time, and he used to stop and pick them up and take them along with him. He had decided opinions about the colored race and before the Civil War he was known for his anti - slavery work.

"I remember the minister, Reverend William Peck, telling me a story about his mother. He said one time when he was a little boy, he'd got hold of some taffy. And boy like he got it all over his face, and in his hair. You know what a sticky mess taffy can be. He had lovely curly hair, and when his mother saw it all messed up like that, she knew the only thing she could do would be to cut some of it off. It almost broke her heart, Mr. Peck said, but all she said was 'Heavens to Betsey.' That was as near swearing as she ever came in her life, Mr. Peck said. I've often thought about that story when things have happened to exasperate me.

"There's a book here which may help you out; a history of Litchfield with Northfield history in it too. You can look it over, if you wish. It mentions all the old families, gives the history of the Knife Company and so forth. My grandfather was the first of our family to become interested in the knife company. He ran a store up here at the top of the hill, and he acquired a good bit of the stock from people who couldn't pay their bills any other way, and gradually he gained a controlling interest. And then my father, he'd been away to business college and learned accountancy, they asked him to come in and straighten out the company's affairs, which he did, and they made him president. He was head of the company until he died in 1910.

"Our family hasn't lived in Northfield as long as some, but the Catlins were prominent for many years. Grandpa Catlin conducted a private school up on the Litchfield 4 road for a number of years, in the old Turner tavern. It was a tavern at one time, of course. He had

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intended to enter the ministry and he was graduated from Yale, but his health wasn't so good and so he thought country life would be better for him.

“So he opened his school. And he had a number of pupils who became quite prominent later in life, too. James G. Batterson, who designed the state capitol, I believe, was a student at the school. I remember one time when father had a car, he and I were driving towards Thomaston one day, and we came upon some people in difficulties with their car. And father stopped to see if he could be of any help, and we got acquainted with them, a Mr. and Mrs. Swazey, from Litchfield. And it turned out that Mr. Swazey had been a student at Granpa Catlin's school. He said he'd got homesick one time and run away from school. Started home to Litchfield on foot, and Grandpa Catlin went after him and brought him back. Said Grandpa Catlin talked to him so kindly that he was quite reconciled to going back.

“I s'pose if I stopped talking you'd get on better with your work. Drat that oil stove. This is the first year I've ever used one, and I can't get used to it. It gurgles. I complained to Mr. Dick down in Thomaston about it, do you know Mr. Dick? And all he said was “Let 'er gurgle.’

Mrs. Hopkinson's clippings, examined, in a manner of speaking, under fire, are mostly concerned with church history. The “historical piece” written by Mr. Peck is a rambling, discursive article tracing village history to its beginning and mentioning only briefly the Peck family. In a glowing introduction, the reporter declares that “Mr. Howard C. Peck's historical reminiscences in themselves deserved an evening apart.”

Mr. Peck's modest description of the Peck enterprise is confined to the following sentence: “The Peck Brothers sell to parties in twenty towns and have 5 customers in a dozen or sixteen towns.”

But another newspaper clipping reads: “In 1851 Jeremiah Peck moved into town and built the grist mill now occupied by the Peck Brothers. He was such liked by the people,

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perhaps on account of his eccentric ways. Upon the death of the father, the children conducted the business under the firm name of Peck Brothers. Mrs. Mary Norris [?]a daughter) was originally a partner in the enterprise which was later conducted solely by Howard and Henry.

“In June, 1868, they began to grind bone, and since this date, Peck Brothers' pure ground bone has been sold all over the United States. Other articles have been added to the business until a complete list would fill a large book.”

“That is no exaggeration,” says Mrs. Hopkinson, referring to the last sentence. “I remember the mill very well, and they certainly had everything in it. Some say it was burned down by a fire bug. Well, young man, I hope you've found something of interest to you. It was fortunate that I was able to find the clippings. I can't always do it. It's awfully cold today, isn't it? It I was just sure the doctor was coming, I'd ask you to wait and ride back with him. It's a cold walk. But it's hard to tell, just when he'll come. Well, I hope I've been some help. Good luck to you, anyway.”